



## PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

## TULAREMIA

### The Disease

Tularemia is a potentially serious illness that occurs naturally in the United States. It is caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis* found in animals (especially rodents, rabbits, and hares).

People can get tularemia several different ways:

- being bitten by an infected tick, deerfly or other insect
- handling infected, sick or dead animals
- eating or drinking contaminated food or water
- breathing in dust from soil, grass, grain, hay or other material contaminated with the bacterium *F. tularensis*.

Tularemia is not known to be spread from person to person. People who have tularemia do not need to be isolated. People who have been exposed to tularemia bacteria should be treated as soon as possible. The disease can be fatal if it is not treated with the right antibiotics.

### Symptoms

Symptoms usually appear three to five days after exposure to the bacteria, but can take as long as 14 days.

Symptoms of tularemia could include:

- sudden fever
- chills
- headaches
- diarrhea
- muscle aches
- joint pain
- dry cough
- progressive weakness.

People with tularemia can also develop pneumonia, chest pain, cough up bloody mucus, or have trouble breathing.

Symptoms of tularemia depend on how a person was exposed to tularemia bacterium. These symptoms can include ulcers on the skin or mouth, swollen and painful lymph glands, swollen and painful eyes and a sore throat.

## **Diagnosis**

Consult your healthcare provider at the first sign of illness. The symptoms of tularemia are similar to other illnesses. Tell your healthcare provider if you have been exposed to an animal or bitten by a tick. Also tell your healthcare provider about other activities such as grass or hay mowing. Tell your healthcare provider if you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system.

## **Treatment**

Your healthcare provider may prescribe antibiotics, which must be taken according to the directions supplied with your prescription to ensure the best possible result. Let your healthcare provider know if you have any allergy to antibiotics.

## **Reducing the Risk**

Use insect repellent containing DEET on your skin, or treat clothing with repellent containing permethrin, to prevent insect bites. Wash your hands after handling any animal. Wear gloves when handling sick or dead animals. Be sure to cook your food thoroughly. Make sure your water comes from a safe source.

Note any change in the behavior of your pets (especially rodents, rabbits and hares) or livestock, and consult a veterinarian if they develop unusual symptoms.

## **Tularemia and Bioterrorism**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *F. tularensis* could be used as a biological weapon. If the bacteria were released intentionally, it could result in sickness and death.

## **For More Information Contact**

- Your healthcare provider
- Your local department of health
- The New Jersey Dept. of Health and Senior Services, Communicable Disease Service at (609) 588-7500
- You can also visit the following websites:
  - The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services website at [www.nj.gov/health](http://www.nj.gov/health)
  - The CDC website at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/tularemia>.